

Play on Words: A Single Couplet Written on a *Tatbîk* Register*

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Context

The couplet presented here was written on the last page of a *Tatbik* Register catalogued in the *Meşihat* Archive under the general number 557.¹ *Tatbik* Registers² are registers that list state agents' or state-affiliated agents' names and their official seals. This type of register is specific to *kāzī* and *nā'ib* (judge and deputy judge) seals which are listed geographically. Such registers are kept in their relevant offices and are consulted upon the arrival of correspondence from judges. In order to authenticate the authorship of a document, a scribe would compare the seal on the document with the official copy of the judge's seal in the register. This process was initiated when the superior gave an order by writing "*taṭbik*" ("compare/authenticate") on the document. When the authentication was successful, the scribe noted it on the document by writing "*muṭabıkdur*" ("conforming, i.e., authentic/authenticated"). If the scribe couldn't authenticate the seal, he noted the forgery on the document as well.³ On a different page of this register, we also get to see a scribe practice writing the word "*muṭabıkdur*" for his job.⁴

Ottoman judges produced multiple documents in line with their duties, best known among these are *hüccet* and *i'lām* papers. The difference between these documents is discussed in the literature, but it is generally accepted that *hüccet* does not include the judicial decision whereas *i'lām* does.⁵ However, both of these documents include the judge's seal. The scribe who wrote the couplet on the register made use of these technical terms. He chose some words and terms that are intimately related to each other such as *hüccet* – *i'lām*, *hâtem* (seal) – *taṭbik*, *taḥkik* (examination) – *taṭbik*,

¹ MŞH, 557/72. The documents and registers belonging to this archive are also available on the Ottoman Archive's online page, see BOA, İSTM.MŞH.DFT1.d, 557/73. The couplet is positioned on the opposite end of a note related to the delivery of judicial documents.

² The term "Tatbik Registers" is sometimes translated as "Application Books". However, in this context "tatbik" does not mean an application but a comparison, see Şemseddin Sami, *Kamus-ı Türkî*, ed. Paşa Yavuzarslan (Türk Dil Kurumu, 2019), 1189.

³ Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili (Diplomatika)*, 4th ed., (Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2018), 96.

⁴ MŞH, 557/65; BOA, İSTM.MŞH.DFT1.d, 557/66.

⁵ Even though this definition is widely accepted, it might not be true, see Ekrem Tak, *XVI-XVII. Yüzyıl Üsküdar Şer'iyye Sicilleri Diplomatik Bilimi Bakımından Bir İnceleme* (Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2019), 188.

İslām – imān (faith) and created the poetic structure around them which is known as *tenāsüb* in literature.⁶ Moreover, he played with the meanings of the words. The words he chose, especially *hüccet* and *i'lām*, can be read in two different ways. If we read them as bureaucratic terms, the couplet depicts a document as if it were being processed in the Ottoman bureaucracy. However, it is more befitting to read the words with their original meanings, *hüccet* as proof and *i'lām* as communication/statement. Now the couplet depicts a devoted Muslim confessing his faith in God. The play on multiple meanings of a given word is known as *tevriye* or *ihām* in literature.⁷ Our playful scribe seems to have spent some time thinking and creating a couplet with the words he constantly encountered at work, presented below.

Transcription

[*mefā 'ilün –mefā 'ilün –mefā 'ilün –mefā 'ilün*]

Göñül 'arz eyle Haḳka hüccet-i İslāmuñı taḥkīk
Ola i'lām-ı dīnūñ ḥātem-i imān ile taṭbīk

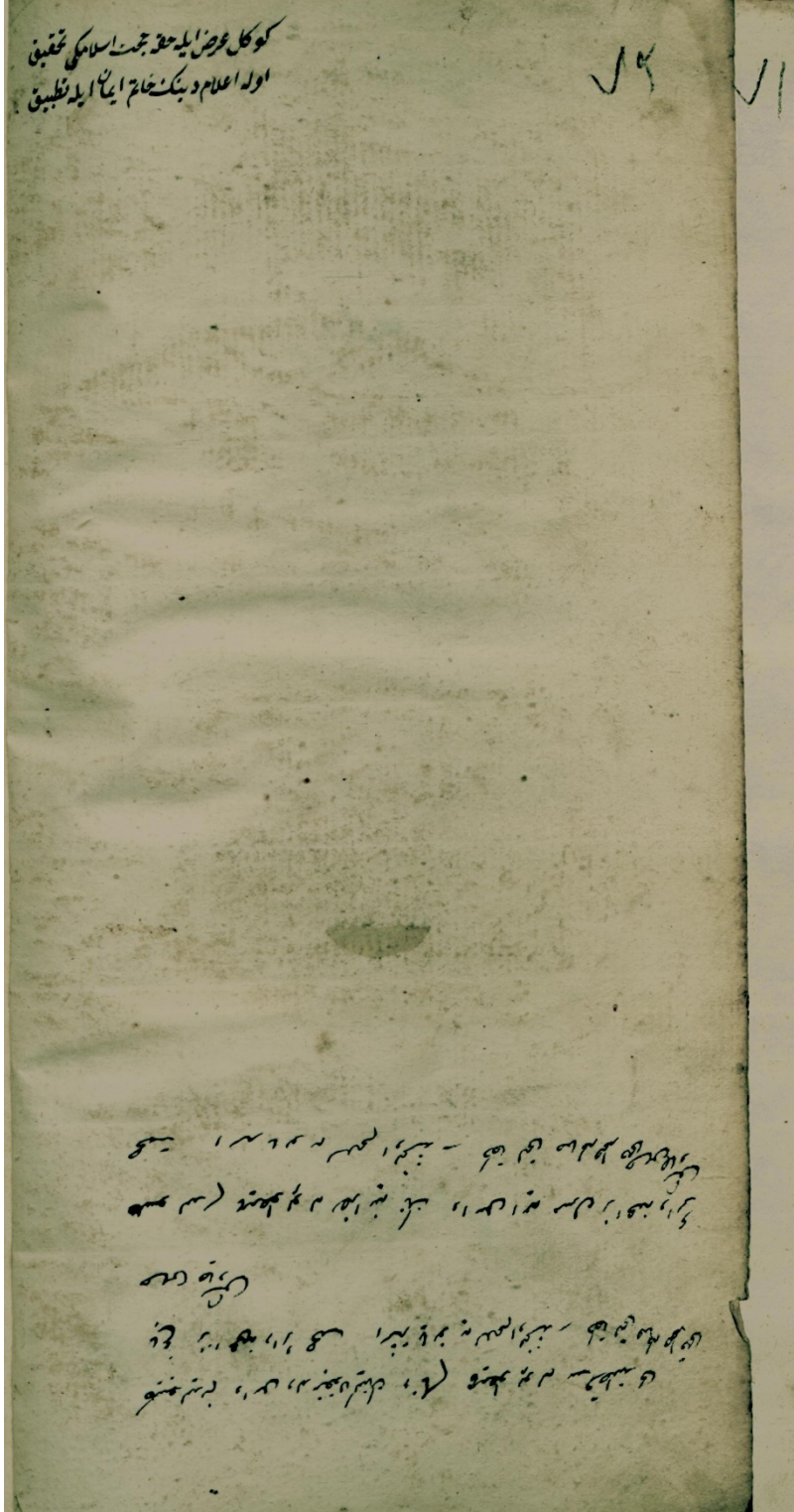
Translation

O heart present your proof of submission to God truthfully
 May your profession of creed be affirmed with the seal of faith

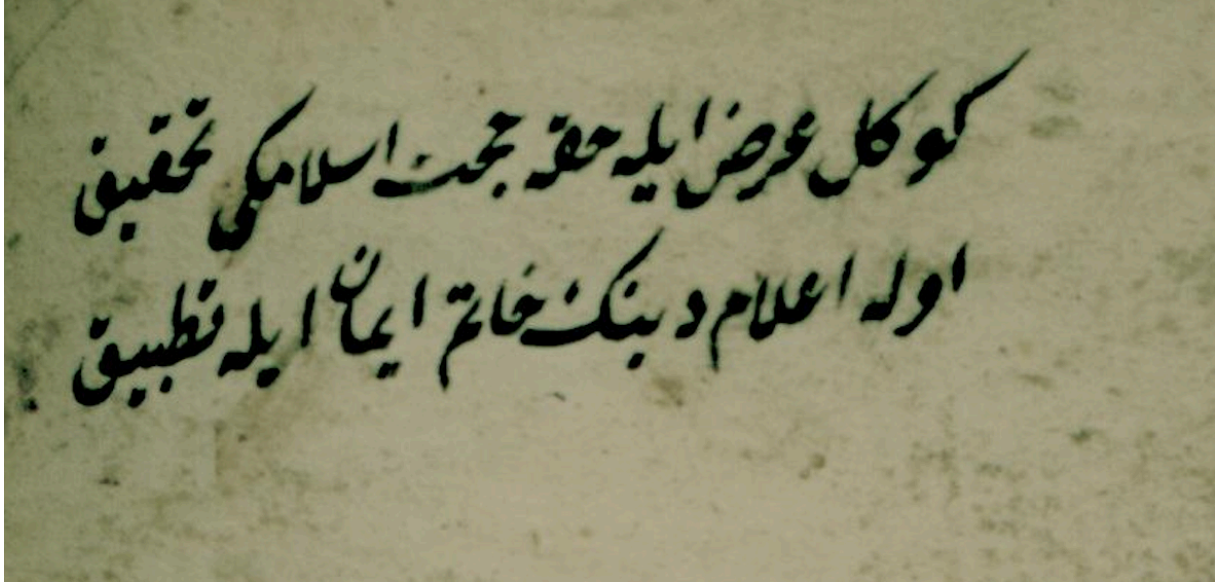
⁶ *Tenāsüb* is a rhetorical device in which a poet uses in a poem or couplet two or more words that are related in meaning other than through contrast, see Hasan Aktaş, *Klasik Türk Şiirinde Edebî Sanatlar* (Yort Savul Yayınları, n. d.), 232.

⁷ *Tevriye/ihām* is a rhetorical device in which a poet employs a word with a double meaning that can be understood either way. In general a poet would use *tevriye* to imply the hidden meaning of a word in a poem, see *Ibid.*, 104.

Facsimile



Detail



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